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ABSTRACT

Schools are more effective for students from strong family backgrounds than for those from weak ones as a result of the interaction between the resources devoted by the family to the child's education, and the resources provided by the school. The elements the family supplies towards the child's education must be developed through investment in "social capital," defined as the resources that reside in the social structure itself--norms, social networks, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to a child's growth. Comparison of the dropout rates of Catholic schools with those of public schools demonstrates that the social capital contained by the school community is an important factor in a youth's educational attainment. But the social capital in American families and neighborhoods available for raising children has declined precipitously over the past 25 years because of changes in society including increased individualism, the narcissistic trends among adults, and the migration of mothers into the labor force. The social capital available to a child in a private school is often minimal, because there is no parent community to support the child. Private schools have the task of forming a school community from a set of independent individuals, and they have evolved in some ways to carry out this task. Studies are described that compare achievement of students in private and public schools, and in developing and developed countries. Two graphs are appended. (BJV)

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SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL: THE AMBIGUOUS POSITION OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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This afternoon, I want to ask you to look at the relation between schools and what lies outside schools in a somewhat different way that is ordinarily done. I do this in an attempt to raise some kinds of questions about schools that might not otherwise be raised.

I begin with a fact that was first made widely known through the Equality of Educational Opportunity report in the U.S., and the Plowden Report in England, about 20 years ago. Colloquially put, it is that differences among family backgrounds make more difference in achievement than do variations among schools. For some persons, this seemed to imply that schools don't make a difference; that only student backgrounds matter. But the result does not imply that "schools don't make a difference": There is evidence that in the absence of schooling, children from whatever background learn very little of certain things, such as mathematics. (For example, when high school dropouts at grade 10 or 11 are retested with the same mathematics test as in grade 10, two years later, their average mathematics test score is almost identical to that at grade 10). What it does imply is that schools, of whatever quality, are more effective for children from strong family backgrounds than for children from weak ones. That is, there appears to be aninteraction between the resources devoted by the family to the child's education, and the resources provided by the school -- and that there is greater variation in the former resources than in the latter.

This would seem to imply that there would be conditions under which school resources would make more difference than family backgrounds. That is, if there is an interaction between school and family resources, then that should imply that school resources should make more differences in settings where there was greater variation in school resources.

As it turns out, this is just what one does find. In less developed countries where schooling and school books are in short supply, variations in school resources do make more difference in achievement than variation in family background. Stephen Heyneman and others at the World Bank have found what was to them, at first a very puzzling fact in light of the by-now conventional wisdom in Western countries, the conventional wisdom that family backgrounds matter more than schools. The fact they found was that in a number of African countries, where there was wide variation in resources for schooling, from textbooks to teaching, that variation in these resources was considerably more important than variation in family backgrounds.

The fact that family backgrounds don't matter very much when there is no schooling, and that school resources don't matter when family backgrounds are extremely weak suggests the interaction between two different kinds of resources. It suggests to me that we look at matters in this way: As the formal institutions of childrearing (that is, the schools and day care centers) are structured, they can provide a certain class of inputs into the socialization process. These inputs can be

loosely characterized as "opportunities and demands." But a second class of inputs comes only from the child's closer, more intimate, and more persisting environment. These inputs can be loosely described as "attitudes and effort"; and the environment which most affects them is, for nearly all children, the social environment of the household. Boarding schools are somewhat different: Because they encompass a child's life around the clock, they do much more to affect this second class of inputs, the attitudes and effort. It was the wisdom of the English upper classes, when they decided they didn't have the time or inclination to devote attention to their children, to bring into being a set of boarding schools as substitutes. Few American families have acknowledged a similar circumstance. Yet there is a gradual reorganization of society in which the family increasingly leaves to the school the tasks of socialization. This merely results in an increase in the one set of inputs, the "opportunities and demands," while ignoring those which interact with them, the "attitudes and effort."

The interaction between two kinds of factors can sometimes cause confusion, not only in the social sciences, but in the physical sciences as well. For example, some years ago in the United States, there was a controversy over what was the "cause" of the algae bloom that was occurring in some lakes, and thus what change would remedy the bloom. One faction argued that it was phosphates from detergents; another argued that it was dissolved oxygen in the water. Both factions agreed on what was

the full cause: It was the interaction of phosphates with the dissolved oxygen, in a chemical reaction that produced food for the algae to grow. What was in dispute was the question of what was the limiting factor that determined the rate of the reaction. The limiting factor was the factor which limited the reaction, the factor that was in short supply. Thus the controversy about whether reducing the supply of phosphates into streams and lakes would affect the algae bloom was in fact a controversy about whether phosphates or dissolved oxygen was the limiting factor. If phosphates was not, then limitation on the discharge of phosphates would make essentially no difference; if phosphates was the limiting factor, that is, it was the short supply of phosphates that limited the algae bloom, then the limitations on discharge of phosphates would make a difference.

In education, the matter can be seen in much the same way. Although the interaction is not as fixed in form as that of elements in a chemical reaction, the elements supplied by the family interact or combine with those provided by the school to bring about educational growth. And if one is in short supply, it is the limiting factor.

I am suggesting that, as suggested by the data, in the West, in developed countries with a fully-developed school system, it is the attitudes and effort, the elements supplied by the family, that are the limiting factor; it is they that are in short supply. In much of Africa, the opportunity and demands, provided by schools, are the limiting factor; they are the elements in

short supply.

We can ask, then, what is missing in the environment of some children. I would like to answer that question by reference to something I will call social capital. What I mean by social capital in the raising of children is not human capital as defined by economists, that is, the knowledge and skills of the parents and the adult community outside the family. I mean resources that reside in the social structure itself. This is the norms, the social networks, the relationships between adults and children, that are of value for the child's growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community. One example will illustrate what I mean by social capital within the family, and how it differs from the more common concept of human capital. A school district in the United States in which children purchase textbooks recently found that some Asian families were purchasing two. Investigation led to the discovery that one book was for the mother, to enable her to better help her child succeed in school. In this example, the mother had little human capital, as measured by level of education; but her intense concern with her child's school performance, and her willingness to devote effort to aiding that, shows a high level of social capital in the family.

Beyond the family, social capital in the community exists in the interest, and even the intrusiveness, of one adult in the activities of someone else's child. Sometimes that interest takes the form of enforcing norms imposed by parents or by the

community; sometimes it takes the form of lending a sympathetic ear to problems not discussable with parents; sometimes volunteer youth group leadership, or participation in other youth-related activities.

Recently, I carried out, with Thomas Hoffer, a study of public and private schools in the U.S. Here is how the concept of social capital arose for us in the study. As some of you know, in 1982, Hoffer and I and Sally Kilgore showed that in 1980, students in private schools achieved at a higher level in mathematics and verbal skills, but not in science, than did students from comparable backgrounds in public schools. (Because of the limitations on sample size, we were able to examine separately only Catholic schools; other private schools were grouped together, heterogeneous though they are.) The same test were given two years later (in 1982) to students who had been sophomores in 1980, allowing an examination of <u>growth</u> in achievement over the two-year period. But that is not the result to which I want to call your attention. Data were also obtained on who dropped out between 1980 and 1982. Figure 1 shows this. In the public schools, 14.3% of sophomores had left school without graduating by 1982; in the non-Catholic private sector, 11.9% had left; and in the Catholic sector, it was 3.4%, only a fourth to a third as high as in the other two sectors.

Why was this? After extensive exploration, we concluded that unlike the achievement effects I referred to earlier, this was not the result of greater demands, nor of anything about the

curriculum of the school, but was due to a different relation of the school to the parental community. We concluded that the community surrounding the Catholic school, a community created by the church, was of great importance in reducing dropouts among students at risk of dropping out. In effect, this church-and-school community, with its social networks and its norms about what teen-agers should and should not do and its attention to and interest in children and youth, constituted social capital beyond the family that aided both family and school in the education of the family's children. Furthermore, this social capital outside the family was of greatest value for children without extensive social capital in the home. For example, as Figure 2 shows, in the public schools, coming from a single-parent household increased greatly a child's chance of dropping out of school: but in Catholic schools, children from single parent families were no more likely to drop out than were children from two-parent familis.

These effects were not merely due to rel ious observance; Catholic students in public schools who attended church regularly had lower dropout rates than those who never attended church; but the dropout rates for both were much higher than for their counterparts in Catholic schools.

What was equally striking was that this social capital did not exist in the non-religious private sector, where the middle class dropout rate was substantial. In the independent private sector, most schools draw children individualistically from

throughout the city; parents may share the same values, but often do not know each other, and seldom constitute a community.

A critical test is provided by the non-Catholic religiously homogeneous schools, while like the Catholic schools and unlike the independent schools, are surrounded by a community. Among the non-Catholic religious schools, of which there were only eight (two Jewish, two Baptist, and four other Christian denominations), the dropout rate was virtually the same as in the Catholic sector (3.7%), suggesting comparable social capital in the religious communities surrounding these schools.

It was also possible to find public schools for which the social capital in the community surrounding the school was high; and in these schools too the dropout rate was considerably lower than in the public schools without a strong community surrounding the school; but public schools with social capital in the neighborhood comparable to that in the religious schools are rare.

But why is the extent of community, and the social capital it contains for the young, so much greater for the religious schools than for the public schools or the independent private schools? The answer would perhaps have been more quickly evident to persons other than secular academics, but it finally began to be apparent even to us: Religious organizations are among the few remaining organizations in society, beyond the family, that cross generations. Thus they are among the few in which the social capital of an adult community is available to be employed toward

raising children and youth.

Once we begin to see the current situation for children and youth in this way, then we can describe differently the watershed that I referred to earlier: There has been, over the past twenty five years in the U.S. and in most other Western countries, an extensive destruction of social capital available to children and youth, both within the family and outside it. Within the family, the growth in human capital is extensive, as reflected by the increased levels of educational attainment. But the social capital, as reflected by the presence of adults in the home, or the extent of discussions between parents and children about academic, social, economic, and personal matters, has declined, at the same time that the human capital has grown. This has been exacerbated by what we might call the evacuation of parents from the household, into offices and factories.

Outside the family, in the community, the destruction of social capital, in the form of effective norms of social control, in the form of adult-sponsored youth organizations, and in the form of informal relations between children and adults, has been even greater. The migration of mothers from household into the labor force has meant reduced participation in community organizations, like PTA, Scouting, and others. In addition, Western societies have been invaded by an advanced individualism, in which interest in others has been replaced by an extensive cultivation of one's own well-being. Indicators are the extensive growth in concern with one's health (jogging, health

clubs, etc.), personal appearance, and personal careers. Altogether, the social capital in family and neighborhood available for raising children has declined precipitously. The cost will, of course, be borne by the next generations, and borne disproportionately by the disadvantaged of the next generation -- for the loss of social capital in the community hurts most the children with least human and social capital in the family.

All this would not matter, of course, in a society in which social capital was abundant. In the past many persons have directed much effort toward escaping social norms of an oppressive community. But the world has changed; those of us who live in the West live in an individualistic world, each narcissistically concern with his or her own self-development, with little left over for children, and certainly not for others' children. It is very likely a reaction to this absence of community social capital which has led many inner-city black parents in the United States to send their children to Catholic schools, and others to establish, with other parents, small ad hoc private schools. It is very likely a reaction to the same social changes that has led to the conservative Christian school movement in the U.S. -- a movement in which parents are striving, in the term I have used here, to recreate for their children's upbringing some of the social capital that once existed in local neighborhoods but does so no longer.

As the social capital in home and background shrinks, school achievement and other growth will not be increased by replacing

these resources with more school-like resources -- that is, those which produce "opportunities and demands" -- but by replacing them with resources which produce "attitudes and efforts," that is, those qualities which interact with the ones provided by the school.

What then are the implications of what I have said for independent schools? Going back to the drop out rates shown in the earlier graphs, it is clear that the independent schools are in a different situation than are the religiously-based schools. Why the high drop out rate? I should emphasize that this does not include transfers! the volume of transfers among students in private schools is, as many of you know, considerably higher than the dropout rates I have given. A student was counted as a drop out if, two years after the Spring of his sophomore year, he was not in any school, and had not graduated. A number of these students managed to come back and get their diplomas or GEDs over the next two years, we found when we went back two years later. But this does not negate the fact that they dropped out of high school.

Why was this rate as high as it was for the non-religious private sector? Several points are important.

First, dropout from the non-religious private sector was not "traditional" dropout, that is, from families at the lowest socio-economic levels. There is first of all the fact that by virtue of tuition costs, families of private school students are not at the lowest socio-economic levels. But even within the

student bodies of private schools, dropping out was much less related to family economic background than was true in the public sector. Dropout from the private sector was what has come to be known as "middle class dropouts."

Second, there is a wide range of schools in the independent private sector, serving a wide variety of clientele. For example, less than half of the schools in the High School and Beyond sample were members of NAIS. Some schools within this wide range of independent schools - both within NAIS and outside it -- have among their students a number of who have done badly in the public schools. These are students for whom a private school is the last hope and last resort for parents -- and sometimes this last resort is not successful. The child leaves school <u>despite</u> the change of setting.

There is, however, something beyond this, for the dropout rate was not negligible among those students who had spent their whole school lives in the private sector. If we ask what is different between the religious and non-religious sectors of non-public schooling, one of the prominent differences is that the religious schools grow out of, and are surrounded by, a religious community. Among most independent schools, there is no such surrounding community. There is often a group of loyal alumni who form a kind of core; but a large fraction of parents with children currently in the school are not part of that core, but are part of a large periphery of parents who know few others in the school. They <u>independently</u> send their children to

independent schools. This means that the social capital available to the child in an independent school is often minimal. The child has lost whatever social capital existed in the neighborhood served by the local public school, by the fact of being drawn away from that school. If the child enters as an individual, and there is no community of parents who know each other, shape the norms of behavior outside school, then the child has neither the support of a community of peers, nor that of a community of adults.

What does this mean for the independent schools? It means first of all that the school has a task beyond that of a school whose students constitute one anothers' social environment outside school. This is the task of forming a school community from a set of independent individuals. Private schools have evolved in some ways to carry out this task. One way is through extra-curricular activities. If schools of comparable size are compared according to students' participation in extra-curricular activities it is lowest in religiously-based schools, next in public schools, and highest in independent private schools. Why is it highest in independent schools? Certainly in part because it is more strongly encouraged, sometimes even required in independent schools. But why is this? There may be many reasons; but the analysis I have given above indicates that there is a stronger need for extra-curricular activities in an independent school, to create a community from what is otherwise a set of independent individuals. Religiously-based schools have

various kinds of collective activities, ranging from weekend retreats to church gatherings. Public school students have their neighborhoods and neighborhood groups. Many independent schools have neither. Extensive participation in extra-curricular activities, especially team sports, is one of the elements that fills this void.

An interesting historical note on this evolution can be seen in the case of boarding schools, where the need for creating a community from a set of separate individuals is especially great. In the 19th Century and earlier, the so-called English Public Schools, which were attended by boys from about 11 to 18 years of age, were miserable places, ridden by disorder and conflict. In 1829, Thomas Arnold, became Headmaster at one of the best-known public schools, Rugby. He transformed the Public Schools, in considerable part through introduction of interscholastic team sports (one of which bears the name of the school). These collective activities created what we would call "school spirit," making of a dispirited lot of individuals a community of scholars.

Independent day schools, however, often lack the recognition that is now widespread among boarding schools, that an independent school requires special efforts to create a coherent student body -- because its students are otherwise merely an aggregate of individuals. Thus a student can easily be isolated, alone, without social capital, unhappy with school and self, at risk of dropping out in search of a more satisfying existence.

It is this, I suggest, that is in part responsible for the high rate of middle-class dropout, as well as the high rate of transfer, from independent schools.

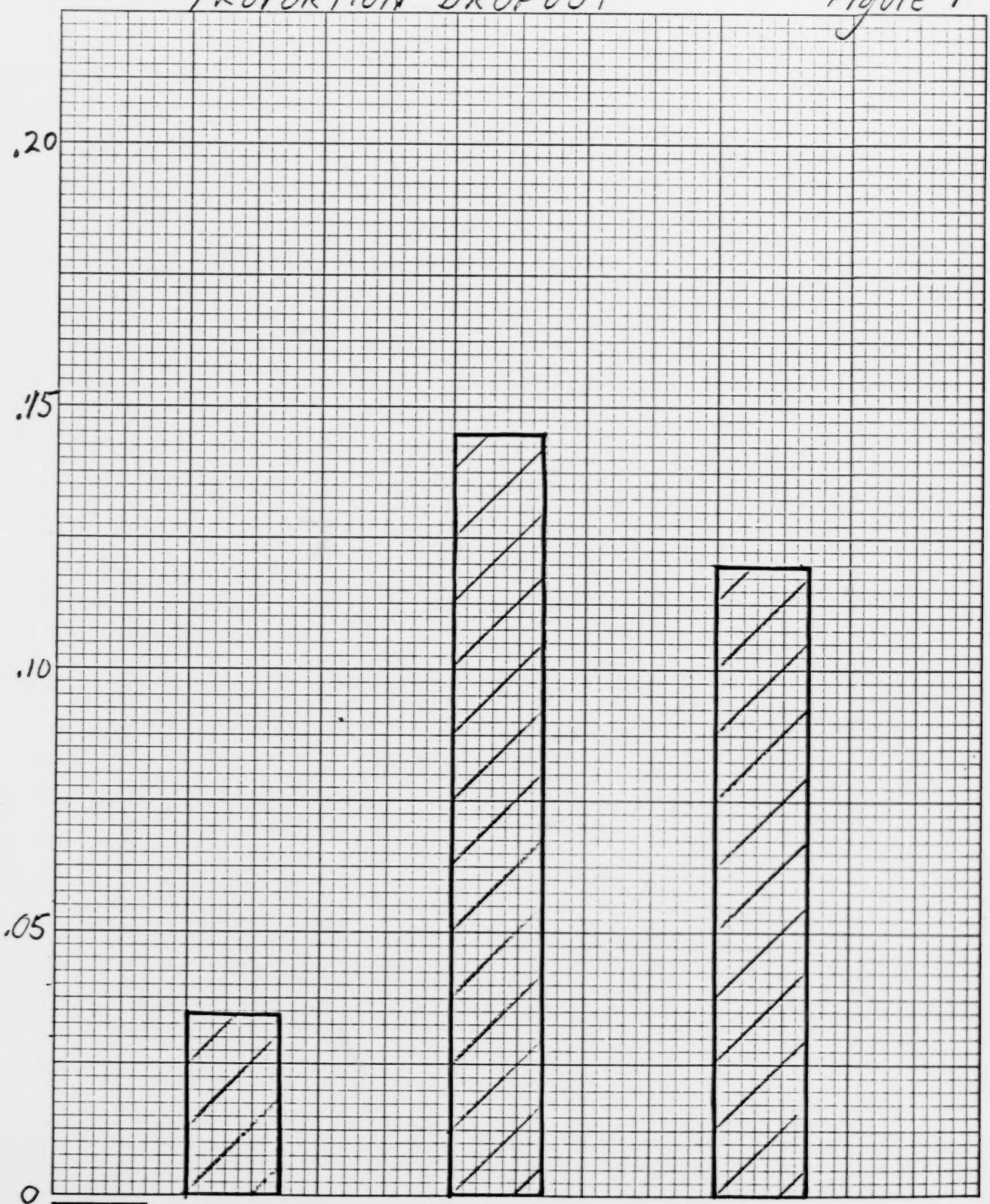
There is a second kind of community as well which if present constitutes social capital for the young. This is the community of parents, that is, adults who know not only their own child, but know each other, know each others' children. Independent schools are accustomed to dealing with parents on an individual basis, but often make no attempt to encourage community among parents. Yet such a community is a strong resource for the school, and a strong resource for the students. The importance of the community of parents -- as distinct from the individual parents -- as a resource is exemplified by the extreme occasions when principals or headmasters attempt to bring such a community into being: when some crisis has occurred among the students, such as a burst of drug use, or incidents involving alcohol, or a student suicide, or a spate of student pregnancies. It is often then that the school brings together parents, to address the problem not as individuals, but as a body, and in concert with the school. What is often unrecognized, by school and parents alike, is that if such relationships had been created before the event, they would have constituted a kind of social capital to anticipate and head off the potential problems before they became crises.

What, then, is the overall import for independent schools of the research that I have described here? I believe it can be put

in this way: Being an independent school has not only benefits, but also costs, arising directly from the independence of the school: drawing its students independently, from parents who are themselves strangers to each other and to the school. The independence of students and of parents means that whatever personal and financial resources they have, each lacks the social capital necessary to aid a young person in traversing the difficult path of childhood and making the even more difficult transition to adulthood. It is part of the task of the school to provide that, not only within the student body itself (a task which many independent schools recognize and address), but also among the parents of those students. The creation of this capital will, if successfully accomplished, pay returns both to the school and to its students.

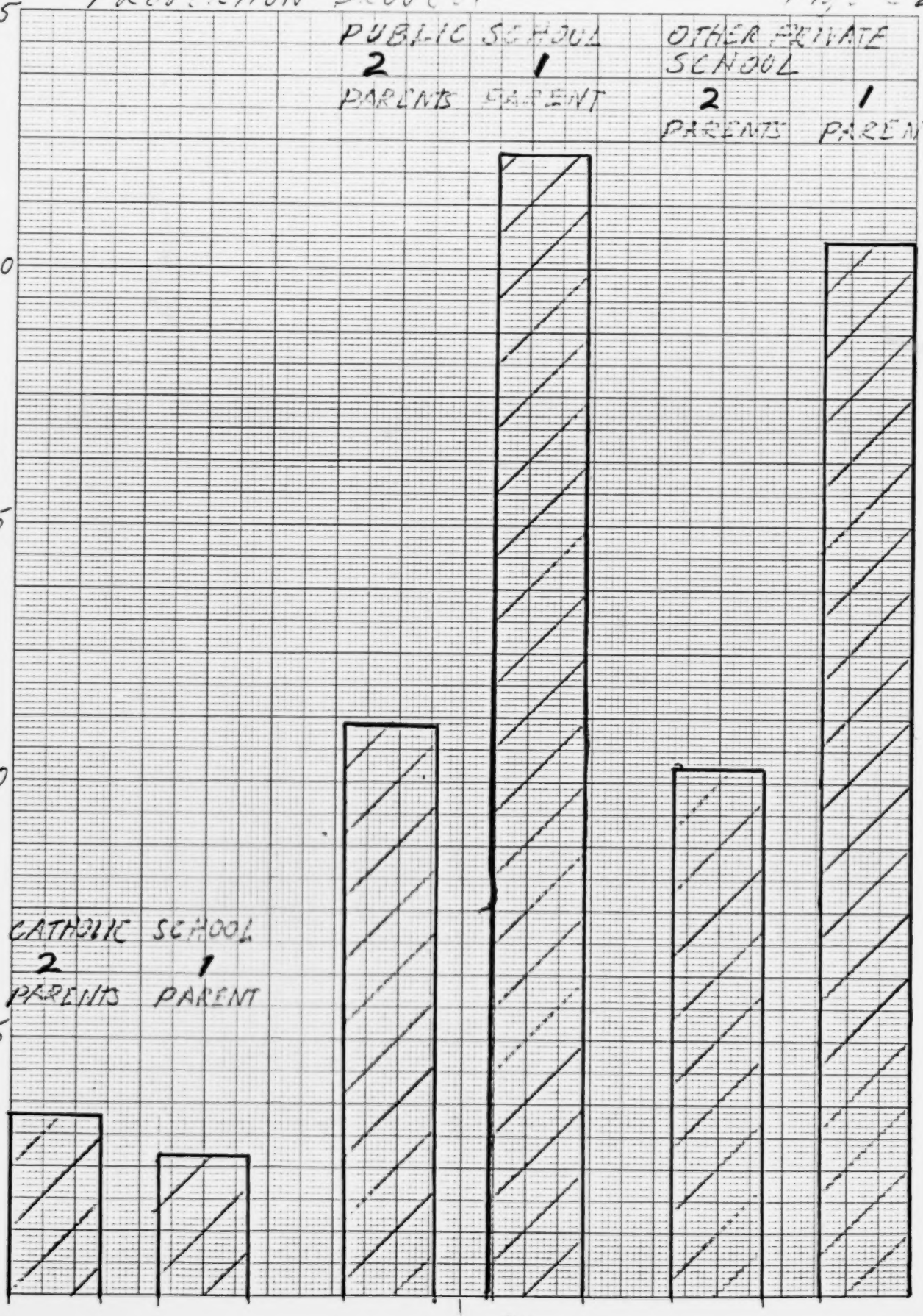
PROPORTION DROPOUT

Figure 1



PROPORTION DESIRED

FIGURE 2



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